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M.M. Vardy

Enemies

The doors of their cell closed with a bang behind them. One of them was tall, around 19, the other, shorter of 17 years, but looking older, closer to the age of his partner. Both were wearing battered, zippered sport jackets, and were still shocked and dazed by the rapid succession of events that landed them here.

When they looked around they noticed the inmate of the cell, who had been there before them: He was a tall, blond youth, around their age, or perhaps 20, in German Army uniform, without the insignia of his service.

-"Hi, what's your name?

-"Heinz R., and yours?

-"Nicholas."

-"And yours?" pointing to the other newcomer.

-"George.

-"What did they take you in for?"

-"They did not like our I.D.-s."

-"Those KZ-ler Schweinehunde!" (concentration camp inmates, dirty dogs).

Heinz was referring to the known fact, that some of the newly recruited detectives were local born, former concentration camp inmates.

-"What are you in for Heinz?"

-"I broke out of a P.O.W. camp of the Waffen SS in Tyrol, and they caught me, those son of a bitches."

The atmosphere in the cell became tense, heavy with unexpressed mutual suspicions.

The two novices were wondering: -"The blood of how many Jews are on Heinz's hands?"

-"Does he suspect that we are Jewish?"

Heinz threw furtive glances at the newcomers from the corner of his eye. "Are they plants by the 'Kazetler' detectives, to worm out from me my secrets?" -"I would have to watch them." -

"They could also be black-market operators, though."

The two newcomers were stopped for identification on the streets of the city, recently occupied by the Russians from the Nazis, by a couple of civilian detectives of the recently reorganized police. On Nick, the younger of the two, they found in

his suspiciously bulging sport jacket 100 grands of the local devalued currency. It was still more than a year's salary of a government official. Nick's.'s I.D. showed the name of a liberated concentration camp prisoner, not his own. The paper had been

borrowed from a friend, whose native town was given as Polish. But Nick knew no more than a couple of sentences in that language.

The false I.D., considerably dampened Nicks's self assurance in protesting his arrest. Essentially, there was no ground for indictment against them, other than the posession of the suspiciously high sum of money. Yet they couldn't possibly reveal the real designation of it.The unexpressed suspicion of the detectives was that the two were black-market operators. In normal circumstances, with a lawyer at their disposal, there couldn't have been ground for keeping them even for a day. But, to their bad luck, none of the above conditions existed. They were not given the opportunity of any hearing, where they could have tried to present their story. They were not even fingerprinted, just sent directly to their cell after their money

had been impounded.

They were quite aware of the fact, that a state of law did not yet exist in the country. Such a condition was still totally unknown to this police force, just recently taken over from the Nazis. Arbitrary arrest was not unusual, and the only safeguard against it was connections to one of the occupying powers. They could not openly request contact to their potential protectors, since those were not aware of their present identities. The fact that such a big sum of money was involved, made it alto Tempting for the newly recruited detectives to lay their hands on It, with the hope of impunity. Their apparently guilty suspects couldn't be expected to effectively protest. Their outlook for release in the foreseeable future was, therefore, quite bleak.

The newcomers soon found out from Heinz the regime and rules in this prison.

-"You may as well forget about seeing any chow today." "The trustees grab it for themselves, as a rule." informed them Heinz.

-"It won't be until tomorrow until you can expect your first meal."

Their prospect was thus to be without food for 24 hours, since they haven't eaten that day. The agenda had thus been established, food had become their favorite topic of conversation. It is very difficult to think of anything else when hunger is nagging at your stomach.

There had been serious food shortage in the city since the siege. In the last days of the fighting the famine was such, that a piece of horsemeat cut from a dead horse on the street, was worth a fortune, and was traded in the black market for a pound of

sacharine. Since the occupation the daily ration coupon was good for about 500 calories in mainly bread and potatoes. That is, for those fortunates who were provided with the ration coupons. There were tens of thousands in the city unrecognized by the authorities, and thus without the coupons. Those were, of course, totally on their own, and had to hustle to feed themselves as best as they could. Many had been putting their wedding rings on the black market for food. The rumor was, that respectable middle class women were to be had for 100 gram of bacon, and, of course, you could equally be killed for the similar quantity.

The few liberated prisoners of concentration camps, who had reached the city despite the discouragement of the military authorities, were lucky to be able to count at least on the plate of potato soup at the Joint's (American Jewish Welfare Org,) kitchen.

Yet the authorities insisted that the present situation did not quite qualify for the distinctive title of famine, it was only a 'severe shortage'. It was easy to calculate therefore, how much the authorities had to spare for the feeding of the undesirables of the prisons. It was 200 gram of bread, two plates of thin soup with some peas in it, and a cup of ersatz coffee mornings, of course, without sugar.

"Where are you from? Asked Heinz.

-"From Hungary."

-"Were you in the army?

-"No, they didn't get us in that one, we got lucky. Not quite draft age during the last draft of teenagers." "They caught us in the auxiliaries, though." That's what got us here." "Now, trying to get home, that the Ruskis shouldn't catch us."

"Where are you from?" Asked Elena.

-"From Hungary."

-"Were you in the army?"

-"No, they didn't put us in that one, we got lucky. Not quite
dead age during the last draft of teenagers." "They caught us in
the mountains, though." That's what got us here." "Here, trying to
get home. That the Russkis shouldn't catch us."

-"Where your I.D.-s self-made?"

-"You are getting warm, buddy!" "Who knows, what the guy may have had on his buckle, from whom we bought it." "Now we are stuck with them but also "ohne" (=without), since they took those papers off us."

-"Your German is pretty good for a Hungarian, isn't it?!"

-"Thanks, Heinz. It could be better." "My family is from Volksdeutsche stock." (German minorities in Eastern Europe) "My grandma was Schwaebisch." Said Nick, the younger, whose German was now under dangerous scrutiny.

-"Where are you from yourself, Heinz?" Asked George.

-"I am a local boy." "My Mom lives not far from here." "She is a cleaning lady in a government office."

-My Dad is an officer, though." Announced Heinz after some pause, with visible pride.

-"Where is he now?' Asked George.

-"I am not quite sure. I lost touch with him when I was still a baby." Added Heinz, somewhat crestfallen.

-"Where have you served?' Asked Nick.

-"On the Western front. -I got wounded twice, before the Amis caught us." -"I was drafted from the Hitlerjugend when I was not quite 18. Only the strongest looking were lucky enough to be

-"Where you [illegible] self-made?"

-"You are genius, sonny buddy!" "Who knows, what the guy may have had on his buckle from whom we bought it." "Now we are stuck with them but also "clone" (=children), since they took there papers off us."

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-"Hindsight Hanna. It could be better." "My family is from

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- "Where are you from yourself, Heinz?" Asked George.

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- I am not quite sure. I lost touch with him when I was still a baby." Added Hanna.

-"Where have you served?" Asked Nick.

caught us." -"I was drafted from the Hitlerjugend when I was no

quite 15. Only the strongest looking were lucky enough to be

admitted to the Waffen SS. (Fighting SS). We had much better chow than those shmoks in the Wehrmacht (Regular Army). And the girls had much more respect for you when you wore SS uniform."

Gradually they had come to relate to each other almost like any other youth of their age would. Their need for human contact was what made them periodically forget their initial suspicions. They eventually also learned from Heinz how to survive in this place. They were not without any relevant experience, but every place was different. Heinz had been here already for two months. First of all, you had to husband your bread ration, which you received with your morning ersatz coffee, for the whole day. If you failed to resist the urge to gobble it all up, it was hard to get through the day. When they had finally learned and adjusted, they started feeling weak and somewhat apathetic during the day. They husbanded their energy by dozing for stretches of time on their seats, and spoke only in spurts. The benches, which served as beds, had to be chained to the wall after the 6 o'clock morning wakening. They were freezing during the nights with their single blanket, despite the warm days of early September, because of their low calorie intake. When they spoke, it was mostly about food. Less frequently, they also talked about girls. One morning, when Heinz was still energetic from the night's sleep and the morning bread, he expanded on his idyllic situation in the camp, from where he broke out. He seemed still under the benign spell of some consoling dreams -"I had this girl, Gretl, the daughter of the farmer, Schoenbauer, on whose field we were stacking up hay." He said wistfully. "She would do anything for me. She would smuggle to me bacon, bread and even schnaps, whatever she could, from her father's house." "Her skin you should have seen, cream and peaches..." "She would sneak to me nightly into the barn where we were sleeping."

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Gradually they had come to relate to each other almost like any other group of men

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-"I had this girl friend, the daughter of the farmer, Schmeisser, on whose field we were working to pay." He said excitedly. "She would do anything for me. She

wanted to go to the cinema. Several times even walking, when my site would from the

farmer's house." "Her skin you should have seen. Cream and

peaches..." "She would speak to me openly into the barn where we were sleeping."

They enjoyed the story, and were together drooling over it. The fun was only slightly marred by their pangs of envy. They also accepted without undue quibble the possible embellishments the narrator may have made in the historical truth in it. It was expected in such stories, which were close relations of wish-fulfilling dreams. It was hard to tell, though, what excited them more: The bacon or the girl?

Nick, whose fluent German made him the spokesman, felt at some disadvantage in reciprocating Heinz's story. Nick's range of experience with girls was as yet more restricted; and they had also to watch themselves for slips which may have betrayed their identity. This restrained their natural garrulity.

On another occasion, they came to talk about the black market operators. In the present devastation of the city without the services of those characters the starvation in the city would have been even graver. Since no legal commerce existed as yet, nobody could avoid complicity in this only functioning distribution system. None of them expressed much sympathy for those guys, who tried to get rich at the cost of the misery of the others. Heinz made casual reference to "those Jews in the black-market". :

-" Have you met any Jews lately? asked him Nick equally casually.

-Heinz became thoughtful for a moment.

-"To tell you the truth, if I come to think of it, -the only one I could remember having met personally was our milkman. He was a red haired guy, though." Answered Heinz, sounding somewhat surprised himself about the fact.

This was one of the occasions when Nick thought of the possibility, that Heinz may shave gotten wind of their identity. But there was not much they could have done about it. They'd better try to ignore it, or forget about it.

The stories of Heinz about his girl, Gretl in Tyrol, gradually became a pleasant common ritual, in which all of them actively participated with increasing identification. At times they would avidly discuss the possibilities, how to get in touch with her, to reassure her about Heinz's whereabouts. They felt by then very much like participants in the affair, in the continuation of which they were now directly invested. It was implicitly understood, that whoever it will be to get out first, will travel to Tyrol and get in touch with her.

Heinz's mother once managed to get a loaf of bread into the prison for her son, aided by some connections to one of the prison guards. It was unclear, whether she had saved it from her own rations, or obtained it somehow on the black-market. It represented a treasure even outside the prison. Heinz handled it as discreetly as he could, not to arouse the envy of his cellmates more than necessary. The other two cooperated, initially, shyly averting their eyes. After all, hadn't Heinz been here for two months longer than they? But eventually, they couldn't help eyeing him in the small space of the cell, as he was slowly savoring his additional slice. After a while Heinz, as if jerked by a sudden decision, cut off a thin slice of the loaf, cutting it in half to divide it between the two. He averted his eyes handing it to them.

It was devoured only with a shy mumble of thanks, as if the generosity of the gesture would have embarrassed them all.

Since this event Heinz had felt free to discuss his mother with his cellmates. His status, of having been born out of wedlock to a single mother, to a father he had never met, became increasingly clear to his audience, even if it was never so stated by

him. He had stopped mentioning after a while, though, his mysterious father, the 'officer'. When Heinz told episodes about his life in childhood, there were always only his mother and him. There was no sign whatsoever of any third person's existence, even from a distance. The picture that emerged was of a devoted, struggling single mother, who lives primarily for her only son, the sun and stars of her life.

The son had been using the Hitlerjugend, and later the men's world of the Waffen-SS, to distance himself from the tentacles of this fatherless, Mother's World.

Mother's self-sacrificing present, the loaf of bread, revived vague pangs of guilt in Heinz, for having neglected her during some of his good times on the front. Another obligation, therefore, for whoever gets out first: To take a loaf of bread to mother, whatever the price.

-"I fooled those bastards."

Says Heinz, referring to the detectives.

-"I had my Mauser hidden in a drawer in my Mom's place. It is a place they'll never find out." He said with a glee.

The specter of the Werewolfs, the partizans whom the Nazis had trained from among Hitlerjugend to continue to fight a rear guard action to death against the occupiers after their defeat, was still haunting both the occupation powers, and the newly installed part of the police. It was still unclear at that time, how much of it would be real, and how much empty

propaganda. The few leaflets the intelligence services of the occupiers had picked up, could have also been spread by some desperate, but toothless, old party members. One could not ignore, nevertheless, the danger.

Nick did not know, what to believe of Heinz's gun story. He strongly suspected, however, that it was more a figment of Heinz's imagination, invented to sooth his injured masculine pride. He had difficulty seeing in Heinz the capacity to commit violence in a solo act, when not physically in his unit.

As time passed, they had fashioned from scraps of paper and a stump of a pencil they had, a chess game, drawing the squares on their table. The chess games thus had also introduced a certain competitive element in their relationship, but at the same time also extending the danger-free zone in it.

The prison-guard who smuggled in the bread for Heinz, became eventually also the vehicle for the liberation of the two. He had consented to mail for them a postcard to an uncle of George, who was a director of an influential committees in the city. The uncle had daily business contact with the new head of police, who had been a concentration camp prisoner under the Nazis, a social-democrat, a "political prisoner" in the camps. They took this step, of finally appealing to the uncle, only as a last resort, out of desperation, for in two weeks they hadn't even been called for an interrogation Their worst fears seemed to had materialized, the arresting detectives, or their superiors, appeared to have 'thrown away the key'. The uncle as a saviour was a dubious bet, since he had been known to oppose the mission in which the two were arrested. But their gamble eventually succeeded. In a further week they had been unexpectedly summoned, and instead of any further interrogation, had been unceremoniously released without a word, driven by car to the

uncle's institution by another couple of detectives. The uncle, predictably not too happy about the embarrassing incident, told the two, that they may as well forget about the money that was taken from them and consider it as a relatively cheap price for their freedom. "I had to use up one of my precious chips with the head of police, to get back your freedom, you rascals;" he grumbled.

After having been freed for a while, one of the detectives had tried to pressure the dazed two, to reveal whatever incriminating information about Heinz they had learned from him during their joint imprisonment. After all, weren't they also on the side of the authorities, as their illustrious connections attested?

Not to speak of their common interest to get one of the SS. In his separate interview with the policeman, George had revealed the existence of the alleged pistol Heinz was supposed to have hidden, and informed Nick about it only after the fact.

Nick still smarting under their treatment by the police, wouldn't trust them for a dime to administer anything resembling justice. They weren't much of an improvement in his eyes over the types he had come to know under the Nazi regime

He saw therefore no reason to change his habitual wariness toward police, and cooperate with them. George, persuaded or blackmailed by his uncle, had already decided anyway to give up his activities for the cause, and return to his family and university studies in Budapest, like a good boy.

Nick had obtained a loaf of bread and delivered it after some difficulties, anonymously, to Heinz's mother in the working class suburbs

Not so long thereafter, in course of another mission, he found his way over the difficult border from the internationally divided city over the Russian Zone into the

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American one, in Tyrol. He found the mountain farmer, whose daughter was H.'s sweet heart, and delivered the message. Gretl he had not met, since she was not at home during his visit. It was not difficult to discover, however, during their brief conversation with the farmer, where the sympathies of the man stood. The Tyrolean farmers had always been Hitler's staunchest supporters, -Hitler himself came from this area,-and the farmers still hated the victorious occupiers with a vengeance.

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